

# Financial Discipline

An Interview with Ilene Anders, Chief Financial Officer, Alliant Insurance Services

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Ilene Anders oversees Alliant's finance, accounting, and IT operations. She brings a multidisciplinary approach to the position well-suited for an industry where the worlds of finance and technology continue to merge. She previously served as Alliant's Chief Information Officer, where she created the vision for client-facing technologies, directed business intelligence, and oversaw the integration of systems and infrastructure. Prior to that, Anders was Alliant's Vice President and Director of Financial Planning and Analysis. She also has experience in investment banking and corporate development with Prudential Volpe Technology Group, GMAC-RFC, and has served as a strategic consultant to start-up organizations. Anders holds a bachelor's degree in finance from Boston University and a master's degree in business from San Diego State University.*



Ilene Anders

## How do you define the role of the CFO today and how critical is it for the role to be engaged in business strategy?

The CFO role is becoming broader and more engaged in the business than ever before. Capitalizing a company continues to change, and as a private company, the CFO has to be engaged in the business strategy to ensure that the organization is well capitalized. Beyond that, it is essential that the internal pieces – from accounting to technology and data to operations – flow through the entire organization effectively, and the only way to achieve this is to be continuously engaged in the business strategy.

## Will you discuss your multidisciplinary approach to the role and how valuable this approach has been in an industry where the worlds of finance and technology continue to merge?

The worlds of finance and technology have merged significantly in the past decade. Although my career has been heavily focused in finance and corporate development, I also spent five years as CIO at Alliant. This has made me well-equipped to navigate how technology can both support the business and help drive growth. People, data, and technology are critical to our business, so when I think about my role as CFO, I don't see it as a single discipline – it requires leadership in all areas. Really, everything from our core business to finance, technology, operations, strategy, and people.

## How important has Alliant's financial strength and discipline been as the company has grown in size and scale?

Our financial discipline has always been critical to our success as an organization. We have been highly focused in how we approach spending on M&A and other growth initiatives, and the larger we get, the more important it becomes to maintain this discipline. Many companies reach a certain size and can lose sight of spending and innovation, allowing their competitors or disruptors to take market share. The key for us is to ensure that, as we grow, we continue investing smartly, where it makes sense, for our clients and our employees, in the context of where we want to be in the future. Fortunately, these strategies are also attractive to investors, which in turn has contributed to the overall financial strength of the company.

**“Our financial discipline has always been critical to our success as an organization.”**

## How is technology impacting the insurance industry and how critical has it been for Alliant to continue to invest in new technology?

Technology is deeply integrated into the way we function, both in business and in our day-to-day lives. As a result, investing in new technologies is a critical component of our business plan. Ten years ago, the focus was on leveraging technology to create systems that helped manage business more efficiently. While this remains important, the focus has now shifted to client-facing technologies

that help clients understand and manage their risk and spending on insurance and employee benefits products. We've spent a decade investing in this strategy. Central to this conversation is the advent of Insurtech. While this term means different things to different people, the prevailing theme is that it is a way for technology to disrupt the insurance industry. From an investment perspective, we are paying close attention to all of these potential drivers and responding with tools and systems that create value, drive efficiency, and help our clients navigate their own changing business landscape.

## Do you feel that there are strong opportunities for women to grow and lead in the industry?

Yes. It's no secret that insurance has long been a male-dominated industry. There has been an emerging focus on developing and nurturing new leaders that have a different perspective – not just women, but across the entire diversity spectrum. While there may have previously been some opportunities for women to advance in leadership, many may not have felt they were seen as a candidate or empowered to step forward. With the last decade of women advocating for more opportunities and respect in the workplace, I believe what has changed is that women have now found their voice. With allies across all genders, more women are emerging in leadership roles. Mentorship also plays a crucial role in accelerating women in leadership. I mentor several women in the business, and I see more women leaders doing the same. This will only grow in scope, and this is a positive thing for everyone.

## What are your priorities for Alliant's finance and accounting operations as you look to the future?

Ultimately, it's about ensuring we remain nimble and efficient and continue to have the capability to innovate. This is all in service of being the absolute best we can be for our clients. These priorities will direct all of our decisions from an investment perspective and will guide us as we continue to grow and diversify. Continuing to build an organization with great people is certainly a key priority as well, because we can only accomplish these things if we have great people working with us. Alliant is home to some of the best and brightest people in our industry – people who are motivated to do the right thing by their clients and by one another. Leadership is about inspiring people, but it's also reciprocal, where leaders are inspired by people. At Alliant, I can say that I'm inspired every day. ●